Chapter 2: Growing Your Own Leadership Pipeline: The Case of an Urban School Leadership Residency

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Rather than hiring from a pool of school principal candidates prepared by local universities, school districts may choose to play a more hands-on role in preparing their own future principals (Corcoran et al., 2012; Gates, Baird, Doss, et al., 2019; Gates, Baird, Master, & Chavez-Herrerias, 2019; Korach & Cosner, 2017). In most U.S. states, school administrative preparation and licensure require several years of classroom teaching experience, passing a licensure test, and obtaining a graduate-level degree in school administration or leadership (Campbell & Gross, 2012). But in some cases, localities have developed alternative administrator preparation and licensure routes that feature on-the-job training and embedded professional development. These alternative routes have arisen to address regional shortages in licensed school leaders as well as concerns about variation in traditional preparation quality (Herrington & Wills, 2005).

Districts may be especially likely to eschew candidates from traditional preparation routes if they face urgent pressure to change business as usual (including accountability pressure to raise student achievement), or if they face a local labor market shortage of skilled and licensed principals (Lindsay, 2008; Scott, 2018). This case study focuses on a small city that found itself in the former category. Intent on reversing a history of low student achievement via improved instructional leadership and school climate, the city adopted a grow-your-own-leader partnership that would prepare current teachers and junior administrators for future positions as school principals. It did this through a residency model in which educators were employed full-time by

public schools in the city, while also participating in intensive professional development aimed at preparing them to lead school improvement.

We focus here on two research questions about the experiences and career trajectories of residents in the program. First, what were the strengths and challenges of the PLUS program as reported by PLUS residents and supervisory stakeholders? Second, how did residents' career trajectories develop over time?

Over a four-year period, the partnership placed 42 residents, who generally described the program's professional development workshops and leadership coaching as high-quality, equipping them to coach teachers and advocate equitable practices in their schools. But because the city faced declining student enrollments and a shrinking economy, these residents developed these skills in a context that offered few paid school leadership roles at either the principal or junior administrative levels. Meanwhile, residents found it difficult to leverage their newfound leadership skills when they were working in non-principal positions, and especially in unofficial teacher leadership positions. The case study emphasizes the need for a labor market analysis before undertaking a grow-your-own program. It also suggests that the success of a grow-your-own model may depend on district-wide endorsement of a distributed approach to leadership.

The Promise of Distributed Leadership

For school systems, building a pipeline of future school leaders means equipping promising educators with a broad array of leadership skills. Surveying the leadership literature across many fields, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) identified the "basic core of successful leadership practices: setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organization" (p. 8). These are distinct from the core tasks of teaching, which involve the scaffolding of academic content to facilitate student learning (Ball & Forzani, 2009). As such, school systems wishing to cultivate leadership potential among teachers must consider how to gradually prepare them. On-the-job learning may play a key role.

The concept of distributed leadership provides a framework for conceptualizing an onthe-job learning approach. Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) define distributed leadership as being "stretched over the work of a number of individuals" and grounded in "the interaction of multiple leaders" (p. 20). Whereas traditional leadership implies a vertical management structure, a distributed leadership approach retains some formal hierarchy but also disperses leadership responsibility horizontally among members of the organization, including those who may not hold formal leadership roles (Harris, 2009; Spillane et al., 2004). Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) found a positive association between the distribution of leadership tasks across teaching staff and student engagement, while Harris and Muijs (2002) detected a positive relationship between teachers' involvement in leadership activities and students' motivation and confidence.

More-recent studies have sought to examine the conditions that facilitate leadership distribution within schools. In a study of eight schools in a large Canadian district, Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, and Yashkina (2007) interviewed informal teacher leaders and their principals and teaching peers to identify factors that inhibited and supported distributed leadership. They found that the distribution of leadership responsibilities worked best when principals, and even district office leaders, structured opportunities for teachers and staff to take on responsibility for key initiatives. It also depended on teachers having the skills to implement the principals' vision.

The sharing of leadership tasks may, in turn, improve school effectiveness if it extends the reach of formal leaders by expanding teachers' access to instructional support (Akiba &

Liang, 2016; Goddard et al., 2007; Kraft et al., 2018; Moolenaar et al., 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). In addition, the distribution of leadership responsibilities may encourage employee retention among teachers seeking professional advancement (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Grissom, 2011).

This is important because the path from administrative licensure to the principalship can be lengthy and uncertain. Tracking Texas teachers from administrative licensure forward, Davis, Gooden, and Bowers (2017) found that only 20% became principals within six years, and that fewer than half became principals within the 16 years observed in the data. Bastian and Henry (2015) found an average time of 5.12 years between licensure and the principalship among North Carolina educators who eventually became principals. Grissom, Mitani, and Woo (2018) tracked graduates from 12 principal preparation programs in Tennessee, finding that between 28% and 52% were hired as assistant principals within five years, and that only 6% to 17% were hired as principals within five years. How well schools are capitalizing on the leadership training of these educators is not clear in the literature, and it is an issue we consider in this case study.

The current chapter focuses on Pathways to Leadership in Urban Schools (PLUS), a program launched by TNTP (formerly The New Teacher Project) for recruiting and training promising school leaders through in-service residencies. Since its inception in 2014, the program has operated partnerships with several cities across the U.S. Each partnership has featured its own local recruitment process, prioritizing skilled educators familiar with local schools and their needs.

Part of a larger evaluation study described in Steele, Steiner, and Hamilton (2020), this chapter describes the four-year implementation of one PLUS program in a small U.S. city. We focus here on the experiences and career trajectories of residents in the program. After presenting

key attributes of the program, we describe the strengths and challenges of the PLUS program as reported by residents and supervisory stakeholders. We then describe how residents' career trajectories developed over time. We conclude with recommendations for other grow-your-own programs.

The PLUS Program and its Context

Our analysis focuses on implementation of the PLUS program over a four-year period in a small U.S. city, whose schools faced low student achievement and a shrinking enrollment base. The PLUS partnership was part of the city's strategy to create a skilled pipeline of school leaders who had taught in the city and who expressed a long-term commitment to the community.

Due to a decline in the city's manufacturing base, its population size had shrunk by nearly half, to fewer than 100,000 people, since the 1950s. Between 2003 and 2016, the average percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch in the city's public schools was about 90%, as compared to 36% for the remainder of the state. Students served by the district were mostly African American or Hispanic, at 44% and 54% of enrollments, respectively, in 2017-18. Between 2003 and 2016, schools' academic proficiency on state accountability tests lagged the average performance for the rest of the state by 18 to 30 percentage points.

In 2013, the city partnered with TNTP on a plan to recruit and train promising local educators to become licensed as school principals. The partnership received five years of funding from a U.S. Department of Education School Leadership Program grant, allowing the program to launch in the summer of 2014.

Program Components and Theory of Action

The PLUS program's theory of action is formalized in the logic model in Figure 2.1. It shows the key *inputs* of strategic recruitment, intensive coaching and professional development, and on-the-job training leading to transformations in school *processes* (improved student support and intensified instructional coaching), which were, in turn, expected to lead to improved *outcomes* in the form of student behavior, attendance, graduation rates, and achievement.¹

[INSERT FIGURE 2.1 HERE]

For each cohort, the program began with a summer institute. The institute took place over five weeks and included group work, simulations, and role-plays, focused on topics such as observing and evaluating teachers, providing "bite-sized," actionable feedback to teachers, and "managing up" to work effectively with supervisors.

During their first residency year, residents also met in person about every two weeks with leadership coaches. The coaches helped them address challenges such as time management, obtaining supervisors' and teachers' support for instructional coaching, and balancing residency duties with other job responsibilities. Residents also participated in monthly, day-long professional development workshops. These provided practice and role-plays on topics such as instructional coaching of teachers, implementing new state academic standards, and using data to make decisions.

Altogether, PLUS provided at least 300 hours of professional development to each resident during the first residency year. During the second residency year, it provided at least 70 hours of support in the form of monthly professional development workshops and periodic coaching.

Residency Roles

PLUS applicants accepted to the program were responsible for finding employment in a traditional or charter school in the city, though the PLUS program provided assistance as needed. In this way, residents' mentor principals were assigned by default; they were principals of schools that had employment openings for potential PLUS residents. Residents were hired into one of three types of residency roles in the city: Lead Educator, Apprentice School Leader (ASL), and Teacher Leader. The first two categories were administrator roles, and the third was a teaching role. Lead Educator positions were limited to district-run schools (i.e., non-charter schools) and were similar to assistant principalships, with duties that included instructional leadership, test coordination, and other administrative tasks. ASL positions were specific to charter schools and were junior-level administrator positions, typically emphasizing teacher observation and instructional coaching duties.

Teacher Leader roles began in the program's second year. These were full-time classroom teaching positions in which residents were also expected to observe and coach a small caseload of fellow teachers. Definition of the Teacher Leader role varied widely among schools, with the leadership aspects of the role defined mainly by the PLUS program rather than the district.

[INSERT TABLE 2.1 HERE]

Table 2.1 indicates the distribution of initial residency placements and first-year residency completion rates across program years. Because all members of the program's first entering cohort in 2014-15 already held administrative licenses, eight of nine were hired into Lead Educator roles, and one was hired as an ASL in a charter school. In subsequent years, Lead Educators constituted a smaller fraction of initial placements due to the scarcity of administrator

job openings. Across the four cohorts, just over half (52%) of initial placements were into administrator roles.

Program Selection and Advancement

In 2014, 134 individuals applied to be part of the first cohort. After several rounds of selection, including interviews and in-person role-plays, nine were selected and hired into residencies within the city, making the placement rate of initial applicants about 7%. Placement rates were reported to be similar in subsequent years. About 67% of initially-placed residents were female. Approximately 57% of initially-placed residents were African American, about 36% were White, and about 7% were Hispanic or other.

As shown in Table 2.1, seven of nine residents in the first cohort completed the first residency year, with similar rates in subsequent cohorts. Residents who completed the program, demonstrated proficiency in all program requirements, and did not already hold administrative licensure received the program's endorsement for a school administrator license from the state.

PLUS was developed with the idea that dynamic educators would be prepared for principal positions from which they could lead school improvement efforts. In practice, one obstacle to realizing this vision was the scarcity of principal positions—and even junior-level administrator positions—in the district. From 2003 to 2016, the number of schools in the district declined from 33 to 21. Coupled with low turnover of school administrators, openings for principalships were scarce. As of the 2016-17 academic year, only one program resident had been hired into a school principalship; another resident was hired as principal of a charter school-within-a-school in 2017-18.

Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

To understand the experiences of PLUS residents and alumni, we conducted crosssectional resident focus groups annually from the fall of 2014 through 2017, and longitudinal case study interviews annually from the spring of 2015 through 2018. We also spoke with a subset of mentor principals and district and CMO officials in the fall of 2017. Specifically, focus groups of about 60 minutes in length were held each fall for all residents in their first or second year in the program. We also invited three to four members of each cohort, selected for diversity of school and role placements, to be part of a *longitudinal case study subsample*, whom we interviewed annually by phone for 60 minutes from their program entry year through the spring of 2018. In the final study year, 2017-18, we also interviewed four mentor principals (three in a focus group setting), two district officials, and two central officials of a partner CMO.

We audio-recorded focus group proceedings and interviews with participants' informed consent. Recordings were transcribed. We developed and refined a qualitative data coding scheme focused on key themes of interest, including prior job experience and training, experiences in the residency placement, professional goals, local context, and challenges and successes. We coded and analyzed the transcripts using NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. As the analysis proceeded, we prepared analytic memos summarizing prominent themes and perspectives that emerged from the data.

Key Findings

In our discussion of findings from the qualitative data, we use the term 'resident' to refer to both current residents and program alumni except when the distinction between the two statuses at the time of data collection is relevant to the analysis.

Strengths and Challenges of the Leadership Preparation Approach

In all four years of the study, PLUS participants reported that they valued the program, found the training to be relevant and applicable in their jobs, and believed that the training would position them for future success as school leaders. In particular, they reported finding value in the PLUS program's job-embedded coaching, its hands-on summer institute and workshops, and the support they received from peers in the program. In the words of one resident in an administrator role, "One of the saving graces about the program is I know there are people who are like-minded, and I'm just not here alone in this district."

Despite the sense of preparedness and camaraderie residents reported receiving from PLUS, they described numerous challenges. These involved imperfect alignment of program expectations with district priorities and limited support for the Teacher Leader role.

Variation in school support, especially for the Teacher Leader role. Across cohorts, residents' experiences seemed to be shaped by how well their principals' visions aligned with the instructional leadership priorities of PLUS. Residents who reported strong alignment generally reported the highest levels of satisfaction with the program. Those who reported less alignment described greater frustration. In district-run schools, this was true for Lead Educators as well as Teacher Leaders.

Philosophical misalignment was rarely cited by residents working in charter schools, perhaps because the local charter organizations shared PLUS's emphasis on instructional improvement. Residents working in charter schools generally reported that their teacher coaching responsibilities were a central aspect of their jobs as ASLs.

In district schools, even residents in Lead Educator roles experienced tension related to their instructional leadership responsibilities. The extent to which Lead Educators were permitted to focus on teacher coaching and feedback ranged, in residents' reports, from less than 20% of their time to a large majority of their time, depending on the extent to which their principals supported and protected that work.

But it was the Teacher Leadership role that garnered the widest variation in principal support, and for which principal support seemed most essential to the functioning of the role. As noted, the Teacher Leader role was created from the second program year, 2015-16, onward. It provided a leadership pipeline pathway for full-time teachers who aspired to administration but did not yet hold an administrative credential in the state. The PLUS program viewed Teacher Leaders as instructional coaches and leaders-in-training, but the extent to which their schools— and even the district—recognized and supported their instructional coaching roles varied dramatically. As a Teacher Leader noted in the second year of the study: "It's almost as though the principals have no idea what to do with us. And that has been stated by higher-ups…They have said, '[The district is] still trying to figure out how to handle you."

Only a small percentage of Teacher Leaders reported that they received a formal release period for coaching teachers. When asked about their coaching caseloads, Teacher Leaders generally reported that they coached three to five teachers each, many of whom they had to connect with through their own initiative, and they noted that they could observe teachers only during their own planning periods. This challenge, they explained, was exacerbated by union rules that precluded teachers from meeting during their lunch or planning periods to debrief observations or receive feedback. Thus, the pool of teachers coached by Teacher Leaders was restricted to only those teachers who were willing to ignore contractual time-use restrictions or meet outside of the school day.

When asked about this conflict, a district official elaborated on the challenge of the Teacher Leader model, acknowledging that:

If the Teacher Leader is on the school leadership team, and at some point the school leader asks and the Teacher Leader answers about what a teacher [is] doing wrong,...it's couched in coaching and feedback, [but] it could be detrimental to the [teacher's] evaluation.

The official added that, for this reason, "to me, the Teacher Leader role is not super highpriority."

Numerous Teacher Leaders across cohorts reported that their principals and peers viewed them simply as teachers rather than instructional leaders. As one Teacher Leader noted, "[My principal] is like, 'Oh, don't worry about observing, we're not going to do that.' And I said, 'Oh no, I'm doing it.'" Another said, "As far as knowing what I'm trying to do [as a resident], the school leadership doesn't. Nobody knows."

Strategic use of the Teacher Leader role. Still, we heard reports that administrators in a few schools were deploying Teacher Leaders strategically as part of their instructional improvement plans. Some Teacher Leaders described being given specific directives from their principals or Lead Educators about which teachers to coach and how to do so. In particular, we heard stories of PLUS-trained administrators using Teacher Leaders strategically as coaches and professional development facilitators. One Lead Educator, a PLUS alumnus, described deploying the school's Teacher Leaders in a variety of ways—coordinating testing, running data meetings, conducting classroom walk-throughs, and setting goals for teachers. Reflecting on the advantages of having multiple PLUS-trained staff in the same building, the Lead Educator

stated, "I love it. You understand that the person has the background knowledge, and you see with same lens, so it's very efficient."

From the perspective of Teacher Leaders, those who worked in the same building as PLUS-trained administrators generally reported receiving greater support for their roles and more opportunities to coach teachers. One Teacher Leader in her first residency year explained, "Three of us aren't in buildings with PLUS residents, and we're the ones who are getting the most resistance."

Though it was described as helpful by many residents, having a PLUS-trained administrator in the building did not guarantee a smooth Teacher Leadership experience. A few Teacher Leaders with administrators who had been trained by PLUS still reported struggling to find time or authority to coach teachers.

Potential to enhance principal role, school operations, and cultural considerations.

The wide variation in schools' support for residents' roles may have been at least partly driven by principals' limited understanding of the PLUS philosophy. One mentor principal who was working with residents for the first time stated, "There should be some orientation for us before [residents] came into our building." When PLUS launched in the fall of 2014, residents noted that the program's efforts to engage principals in formal meetings had not been successful, largely due to principals' busy schedules. And principals did not receive any other formal training about the PLUS program. The result, residents added, was that "Nobody told the principals what our job was supposed to be."

Principals' concerns arose alongside questions about how the program valued their expertise. As one principal explained, "I have 14 years of experience. I [understand] all the coaching the residents are getting, but if they are in our school[s], why couldn't we be the

coaches?" Another mentor principal said, "If [my PLUS resident] were to go to another district, they might not have a [separate] operational manager, so my responsibility is to make sure she learns how to manage a building."

A few residents, too, acknowledged that they would have liked more PLUS emphasis on areas beyond instructional leadership and school climate, including school operations, law, charter school creation, and culturally relevant professional development. On the topic of cultural relevance, one resident commented:

Yes, we work in [this city] with underserved populations and minorities and low SES populations, but I think there's a piece about us developing teachers who, some are coming from that same population and some are coming from completely different places... I think it's specifically about being a leader of color managing and directly supervising people that are not women of color or people of color period. It's been something I want more from PLUS.

In short, both residents and mentor principals expressed concern that the program underemphasized operational and cross-cultural skills that did not directly involve instructional practice but had a clear bearing on it. Having led schools for some time, mentor principals reported that they would have liked to see the program make greater use of their skills and experiences.

Residents' Career Path Divergence

PLUS residents' career trajectories diverged notably over time. Figure 2.2 tracks the career progressions of the four cohorts from the first through fourth implementation years, 2014-15 through 2017-18. The top panel represents the fraction of initially-placed residents who persisted in both the program and the city in each year. As anticipated in the program design, a

small fraction of residents did not complete the first year due to issues of workload or fit, but afterward, persistence rates held fairly steady.

[INSERT FIGURE 2.2 HERE]

The second panel of Figure 2.2 illustrates the share of residents in each cohort who held an administrator role by the end of each academic year. The first-year percentage for Cohort 1 was only 78% due to program attrition, even though all Cohort 1 placements began as, and continued to be, administrative. The fraction of Cohort 2 residents in administrator roles held steady over time at 46%, even as a few residents changed positions or left. For Cohort 3, most of whom began in Teacher Leader roles, the share holding administrator roles nearly doubled between the third and fourth years.

The third panel represents the fraction of residents in each cohort who were promoted from their initial placement levels over time. We define a promotion as moving from a Teacher Leader role to an administrator role, or from an assistant-level administrator role (Lead Educator, Apprentice School Leader) to a principal or acting principal role, or moving from a school-level role to a central office role. Among the first three cohorts, about a third of initially-placed residents had received promotions as of the 2017-18 academic year: 22% for Cohort 1, 31% for Cohort 2, and 38% for Cohort 3. All Cohort 4 residents were still in their first program year in 2017-18.

The reasons that some residents were promoted and others were not was not always clear. School leadership positions are usually competitive, and this is especially true in a district with shrinking enrollments and few open positions. African American and White males were promoted at slightly higher rates (about 33% and 25%, respectively) than African American and

White females (about 18% for both groups), but in such a small sample, these differences are modest.

Residents who had received promotions, or who viewed promotions as forthcoming, expressed somewhat greater satisfaction with the program than those who had or did not. But residents reflected on the determinants of promotion in different ways. Some said that it seemed useful to have worked in a school of similar size and grade levels to those with leadership openings, though others noted the opacity with which promotions became available.

Some residents who had been promoted attributed their success to the leadership coaching they had received in the PLUS program. One noted, "My coach…walked me through the entire [promotion] process from the application, to interviews, through lots of role playing, and what it would be like to be in the interview." Others indicated that they had not received the same level of support:

The people in my cohort were told, "There's an opening. You should put your name out there, and you should apply," and that was it ... Yet, another resident I saw…was working with a PLUS coach, was doing mock interviews…and got the position.

But other residents said they would not have received promotions without their own initiative and persistence, citing the importance of personal initiative in determining who gets promoted:

The more I'm working, I realize it's up to the individual to take what you learned, and not say 'I'm from PLUS, I'm supposed to be...at a certain level.' You as an individual need to take what you learned and go to it.

This range of perspectives suggests that professional development workshops about how to navigate the local hiring context might have increased the homogeneity and transparency of support that residents received.

Discussion and Implications

Launched in 2014 in a small, urban district, PLUS offered a promising model for growing a pipeline of effective future principals. First, it was designed to build on strengths of experienced, local educators who were committed to improving education opportunities for the city's youth, most of whom were students of color and from low-income backgrounds. Second, it provided hands-on professional development attuned to real-world challenges. Third, it placed junior administrators and Teacher Leaders in schools as change agents even as they were learning to take on leadership responsibilities. But residents perceived that their ability to effect change depended on their supervisors' willingness to distribute leadership responsibilities, and that their opportunities to pursue their career goals were limited as a result of local economic conditions. Their experiences raise the question of how pipeline programs might promote a distributed leadership approach.

One finding is that school principals charged with mentoring the residents had a limited understanding of the PLUS program. A recommendation for similar residency programs is to frame the mentor principal's role as a core part of the program. Interviews from the first PLUS year suggested that the program attempted to do this at the beginning and found limited traction, and district officials acknowledged as much in interviews. Even so, the mentor principal's role could be framed from the outset as a type of residency in its own right—perhaps as a senior fellowship. Mentor principals could then receive support in cultivating residents' organizational leadership skills.

Residents also asked for more emphasis on cultural and operational aspects of leadership, Formalizing the role of mentor principals may partially address this concern, but increasing the PLUS curriculum's attention to culturally relevant and operational leadership skills would increase access to this information and signal its importance.

An additional takeaway lies in the variation in residents' career trajectories. The PLUS program's logic model envisioned that the mid-term outcomes of the program would be achieved as residents moved into principalships. However, labor market conditions meant that the program was able to realize mainly just near-term processes—the training of 37 Lead Educators, ASLs, and Teacher Leaders—during its first five years, in addition to the placement of two principals (a mid-term output). The question, then, is how districts can leverage the expanding skill set of residents who are promoted more slowly. More than a quarter-century ago, Firestone and Pennell (1993) noted that educators felt more committed to their work when they perceived that their expertise was valued and that they had opportunities for autonomy and growth. Indeed, Teacher Leaders whose instructional leadership roles were stymied reported feeling isolated and discouraged, and some PLUS alumni who did not see a clear pathway to the principalship began finding leadership opportunities outside the city.

Still, the study provides promising examples of strategic human capital use. In a few schools, the assignment of instructional coaching caseloads to Teacher Leaders reportedly lightened the caseloads of administrators, freeing up more of their time for whole-school responsibilities and allowing Teacher Leaders to hone their leadership expertise. This appeared especially true in schools that placed new residents in schools staffed by more-senior PLUS residents, suggesting that co-location of residents may allow for better mentoring and distribution of leadership responsibilities. If other districts wish to adopt a leadership residency

model like PLUS, promoting a distributed leadership framework may help amplify its efficiency and impact.

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Endnote

1. Evidence about the relationship of PLUS resident staffing to these near-term outcomes, which is mixed, is described in Steele, Steiner, and Hamilton (2020).

Appendix

	Apprentice								
		School							
	Start Year	Lead		Leader		Teac	cher		
Cohort		Educator		(Charter)		Leader		Total	
		Ι	С	Ι	С	Ι	С	Ι	С
1	2014-15	8	6	1	1	0	0	9	7
2	2015-16	2	2	4	3	7	6*	13	11
3	2016-17	0	0	2	2	6	5*	8	7
4	2017-18	3	3	2	2	7	7*	12	12
	Total	13	11	9	8	20	18	42	37

Table 2.1. Initial Placements and First-Year Completers, by Cohort and Initial Role

I=Initial Placement, C=First-Year Completer

* One each in Cohorts 2, 3, and 4 were charter school placements.





Source: Steele, Steiner, and Hamilton (2020), Figure 1.



